

Children Are Just Like Adults

In many ways young children are very different from adults. They have much to learn about the world, need to fully develop their abilities to think logically and abstractly, and need to develop an understanding of the social conventions of their culture. It would be a mistake, however, to just think about young children as different from adults; there is, in fact, one way in which children and adults are very much alike. Children and adults both experience the same feelings and emotions.

Think about the three-year-old child in the preschool classroom who doesn't want to participate in the singing activity that the teacher is leading. Perhaps he is shy or doesn't know the words to the song and will feel embarrassed if he can't keep up with the group. The teacher may try to encourage him to join in and this attention may cause him to put up even more resistance. If this is a pattern in the child's behavior - always avoids participating in activities that involve music - the teacher may describe this behavior to his parents as somewhat of a problem: "Jimmy is doing very well in the classroom but he refuses to join in music activities."

Now think about how you feel as an adult when you receive a friend's invitation to attend a Halloween party for adults and the invitation says, "Come in costume." What is your reaction? Some of us might love the challenge of figuring out a costume and are excited to attend the party. But there are some of us whose first reaction to the invitation is resistance. We might feel that we aren't creative enough to come up with an interesting costume or we don't like being the center of attention; when we go to parties we want to blend into the crowd, not stand out because of what we are wearing. For some of us, our first thought at reading the invitation might be: "What excuse can I come up with to tell my friend I can't attend the party?"

We human beings are capable of experiencing a wide range of emotions: anger, sadness, happiness, frustration, embarrassment, joy, fear. The experience of these emotions is one way in which children and adults are very much alike. The child who feels sad at being excluded by the three children playing in the block corner is no different from the adult who feels sad at not being invited to join his work colleagues for lunch. The child who is unhappy when her mother leaves her at school in the morning is experiencing the same feelings that we might feel as an adult as we are

saying goodbye to our own parents who live a thousand miles away and are returning home from a holiday visit. The emotions that can rise up when separating from a parent are shared by children and adults alike. As adults we may be able to control our emotions (sometimes) and perhaps we are better able to think logically about the situation (I'll see my parents again in a few months) but the feelings about the separation are the same.

Emotions and feelings - both the good and the bad - are part of what it means to be a human being and children are human beings from the moment they are born. Of course the ways in which children express their feelings and emotions can be challenging - the tantrums, the crying, and the resistance might not be fun to deal with - but sometimes it is helpful to remember that he is just expressing the same feelings and emotions that we all experience. When the teacher reports to you that your child never wants to participate in the music activities, it might be helpful to remember that you didn't want to go to that Halloween costume party.

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